

Congressman Pence appeared on the NewsHour last night to talk about the President's Afghanistan strategy.

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Transcript excerpts below:

REP. MIKE PENCE, R-Ind.: Well, let me say, Jim, first, what I do agree with the president on -- and we -- I think House Republicans, like most Americans, appreciate the president making a decision to respond to the call for reinforcements in the field.

After three months of deliberations, the president has essentially given General McChrystal, his own handpicked general for the theater in Afghanistan, the resources and the manpower that he says he needs to get the job done and come home safe.

So, we welcome that, and we support the president's policy. I also think it was important last week, Jim, that the president took some time a week ago at West Point to remind the American people what the stakes are here.

The president reminded us that we were attacked from the al-Qaida and their host, the Taliban, from within Afghanistan, and that, really, the security of that region and the security of the world depends on our success there.

What -- my only hesitation -- and I think it's the hesitation of many of my colleagues in Congress -- is -- again, is the suggestion of an artificial timeline for withdrawal. You know, I understand that Jim McGovern is a very honorable guy and a respected colleague. We respectfully

disagreed on the last surge in Iraq.

And I -- you know, I think we respectfully disagree on this surge. Our concern is now that the president has put this arbitrary timetable to begin the process of withdrawal in July of 2011, that we're going to see many Democrats who oppose the use of military force there, as they did in Iraq, to try and impose legislatively artificial timetables on withdrawal, and -- and we will be opposing that very strongly.

JIM LEHRER: What about Congressman McGovern's point, though, that he just made that this is a -- he thinks this is a meaningless target date?

REP. MIKE PENCE: Well, I -- you know, what has been encouraging, since the hearing -- our hearing before the Foreign Affairs Committee last week, some of the testimony we heard today, is that we're hearing both the secretary of defense, the secretary of state, and now General McChrystal himself suggesting that July 2011 is not a hard date for beginning to withdraw, that there's flexibility there.

You know, we welcome that. But, you know, I'm somebody that believes it's never a good idea to tell the enemy when you're going to quit fighting on a battlefield. And now that our military commanders are clarifying that this is a looser date, you know, if Jim is right on that, then let's just -- let's leave out these arbitrary timelines. Let's give our soldiers what they need to get the job done and come home just every bit as soon as we can.

JIM LEHRER: Congressman Pence, do you buy -- would you agree to that kind of debate? Do you think that's a good thing?

REP. MIKE PENCE: Well, I think it would be a very good thing.

And I -- and I think, at the end of the day, you would see Congress -- maybe not Jim and a few of his colleagues, but I think you would see a majority in Congress support this effort to respond to General McChrystal's request for reinforcements.

And I do think, as we were able to do in the last Congress, I think you would see a majority vote to oppose the imposition of any artificial timelines. You know, Jim McGovern knows, and, Jim, you should know I'm somebody that really believes in deliberation in the people's house. And we would certainly welcome that.

But there can be no mistaking here that an American success in Afghanistan is the imperative. That must be the objective of this nation. And in my judgment, the president has made the right decision in deciding to deploy reinforcements. And we ought to support that without the artificial timelines for withdrawal. But we ought to support it as strongly as we can.

JIM LEHRER: But, in a word, Congressman Pence, you disagree with that basic premise of Congressman McGovern, right?

REP. MIKE PENCE: I really do. And, again, I think one of the best things the president did last Tuesday night at West Point was remind the American people what happened on that day in September of 2001. I was here at the Capitol that day. I watched the smoke rise from the Pentagon. We were attacked from Afghanistan. And we must do what is necessary to succeed there.

JIM LEHRER: All right, gentlemen.

REP. JAMES MCGOVERN: And I was there, too. And I want to go after al-Qaida.

JIM LEHRER: All right. We are going to leave it there. Thank you both, on that note of

disagreement.

REP. MIKE PENCE: Thank you, Jim.

REP. JAMES MCGOVERN: Thank you.

JIM LEHRER: Thank you.